

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1466

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6849

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, MILI, LE

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER KARAME

1. CHARGE, ACCOMPANIED BY EMBOFF LANE, PAID CALL ON PRIMIN KARAME AUG. 9. KARAME ASKED ABOUT AMBASSADOR SEELYE, AND CHARGE EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD RETURNED TO U.S. TO REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY, AND NO DECISION HAD BEEN MADE REGARDING IF AND WHEN HE WOULD RETURN.

2. IN RESPONSE TO CHARGE'S QUESTION, KARAME SAID HE WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT MOST RECENT CEASEFIRE. PALESTINIANS SEEMED READY FOR A CEASEFIRE AND ABU LUTF HAD SAID THEY WOULD ABIDE BY THE CAIRO ACCORDS, BUT HE SENSED THAT PEOPLE ON ALL SIDES FELT THAT MORE FIGHTING WOULD TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE CRISIS ENDS.

3. DURING THE MEETING, KARAME STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF PRESIDENT-ELECT SARKIS ASSUMING POWER SEPT 23. HE SAID THAT LAST YEAR PRESIDENT FRANGIE HAD BEEN WEAK BUT THAT BY BRINGING IN SYRIANS ON CHRISTIAN SIDE AND HAVING THEM DEFEAT AND CONTAIN PALESTINIANS, FRANGIE HAD GREATLY STRENGTHENED HIS POWER AMONG
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THE MARONITES. MANY PEOPLE FEARED THAT FRANGIE

WOULD NOW ATTEMPT TO RETAIN PRESIDENCY AFTER SEPT 23, EITHER BY APPOINTING CHAMOUN PRIME MINISTER OR BY SIMPLY UNILATERALLY EXTENDING HIS OWN MANDATE ON GROUNDS THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR NEW PRESIDENT TO ASSUME POWER CONSTITUTIONALLY. IF THIS HAPPENED, SITUATION WOULD BE MUCH WORSE AND COULD RESULT IN PARTITION OF THE COUNTRY, A RESULT KARAME SAID HE WAS TRYING TO AVOID. KARAME SAID THAT EVEN IF SYRIA WANTED TO PREVENT FRANGIE FROM CONTINUING IN OFFICE, IT MIGHT NOT HAVE THE POWER TO DO SO.

4. KARAME SAID THAT LEBANON HAD BECOME COCKPIT FOR INTER-ARAB RIVALRIES, WHICH WAS ONE REASON THE CRISIS WAS SO DIFFICULT TO SOLVE. SOME SAID THAT NO SOLUTION TO THE LEBANON CRISIS WAS POSSIBLE UNTIL THERE WAS A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. IF THIS WERE TRUE, HE SAID, THERE WAS LITTLE HOPE FOR AN EARLY SOLUTION IN LEBANON. HE URGED THAT THE U.S. AND USSR WORK TOGETHER ON A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINE PROBLEM, WITHOUT WHICH THERE WAS NO HOPE FOR LONG TERM STABILITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

5. REFERRING TO HIS RECENT EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE A CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION IN WEST BEIRUT, KARAME SAID HE WAS DOING SO FOR THREE REASONS: TO FILL A VACUUM, TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT COULD BE TURNED OVER TO SARKIS WHEN HE ASSUMED OFFICE, AND TO BEGIN BUILDING TOWARDS A UNIFIED LEBANON. HE SAID THAT HE WAS ENCOUNTERING CONSIDERABLE OPPOSITION FROM VARIOUS GROUPS NOW IN POWER IN VARIOUS SECTIONS OF BEIRUT, ADDING "MY TASK IS NOT EASY."

6. COMMENT: KARAME OBVIOUSLY ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO SARKIS TAKING OVER PRESIDENCY ON SEPT 23 AND IS DEEPLY CONCERNED THAT HE MAY BE PREVENTED FROM DOING SO. WITH THE FAILURE OF THE LATEST CEASEFIRE AND REPEATED POSTPONEMENT OF QUADRIPARTITE MEETING CALLED FOR IN DAMASCUS CEASEFIRE, THIS EVENT APPEARS AS ALMOST THE LAST HOPE FOR FRESH START TOWARDS ENDING THE WAR AND BEGINNING PROCESS OF
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REBUILDING LEBANON. IN KARAME'S OPINION, IF FRANGIE MOVES TO BLOCK SARKIS FROM TAKING OFFICE, PARTITION OF LEBANON OR RENEWED HEAVY FIGHTING SEEMS ALMOST INEVITABLE.
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